



**To:** Administrator Mark Green, U.S. Agency for International Development  
**From:** Mark Keenum, BIFAD Chair and President, Mississippi State University  
**Re:** Findings, Conclusions, and Recommendations from BIFAD 179th Public Meeting  
**Date:** November 8 2019

**Board for International Food and Agricultural Development (BIFAD)  
179<sup>th</sup> Public Meeting (Virtual)  
U.S. University Feedback on Implementation of USAID’s Automated Directives  
System (ADS) 252 (Visa Compliance for Exchange Visitors) and ADS 253  
(Participant Training and Exchanges for Capacity Development)  
April 9 2019**

BIFAD convened a virtual public meeting on April 9, 2019 to solicit feedback from the U.S. university community on their experiences implementing the regulations that govern USAID-funded Exchange Visitors (EVs) and Participant Training (PT), as per the Automated Directives System (ADS) 252 and ADS 253.

*Findings*

1. Some universities are struggling to navigate USAID’s exchange visitor visa compliance and participant training policies, and this has had human, financial, and reputational consequences. Efficiency, risk management, differential capacity of universities to comply with requirements, and conflicting state-funded provisions are among the particular challenges cited by some universities.
2. The Exchange Visitor Program (J Non-immigrant visa program) is an educational and cultural exchange program including both academic and work programs whose overall purpose is public diplomacy, i.e., participants come to the United States, interact with Americans in their field, and then return home to share what they learn in their home country. All USAID-sponsored J-1 visa holders have a two-year, home-country, physical-presence residency requirement that begins immediately upon their return to the home country. An extension to an exchange visitor program may be permitted by the program to stay in the United States longer for the purpose of getting further academic or practical experience. The extension delays the two-year residency requirement for a defined period, after which an exchange visitor must return to the home country. A waiver of the two-year home-country physical-presence residency requirement may also be considered, based on an exchange visitor’s eligibility for the available options, which, if approved, would remove the requirement to return home to complete the residency requirement.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> USAID reviews and provides a recommendation to the Department of State based on “programmatic considerations” for each waiver request. The Department of State makes the final determination, after taking the USAID recommendation into consideration.

3. The Exchange Visitor Program is regulated under 22 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 62, and the Foreign Affairs Manual (FAM) conveys codified information concerning exchange visitor programs in line with statutory and executive mandates.
4. Program sponsors are designated by the Department of State and must apply to be designated to run particular programs. USAID has a long-standing designation with the Department of State. Designations are not transferable and are generally good for one to two years, after which the sponsors must reapply. Designation ensures that the sponsor is reputable, financially viable, and follows certain uniform practices to support the program.
5. Designated sponsors monitor how the exchange visitor programs are implemented; monitor the health, safety, and welfare of program participants; give participants accurate information at the time of their applications; have standard screening processes; select participants with sufficient English ability; provide accurate pre- and post-arrival information; provide medical insurance that meets or exceeds requirements laid out in regulations; and monitor the status of exchange visitors through the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) in case of emergency, such that the Department of State has access to exchange visitor data and can ensure its protection and privacy.
6. Department of State and USAID exchange visitor programs aim to develop a specific country's capacity and potential and therefore differ from exchange visitor programs sponsored by other U.S. government agencies that do not have a development objective.
7. Recent revisions in the USAID ADS text clarify: (1) that implementing partners may choose health insurance plans as long as they comply with requirements of 22 CFR 62; (2) that exchange visitors may own and operate vehicles as long as they have approval from the implementing partner, USAID is informed, and the driver is in compliance with state and local laws; (3) that dependents may accompany exchange visitors if permitted by the USAID mission and if sufficient funds are available to support the dependent; (4) that allowance rates may be adjusted to ensure that exchange visitors have sufficient funds to cover basic needs; and (5) that depending on the category of exchange, visitors may work up to 20 hours per week, subject to approval.
8. An individual in a "beneficiary" role of USAID's development assistance, which can take the form of long-term education and short-term training, meets the requirements of the exchange visitor program; however, if an individual comes to the United States in a "provider role" of a USAID development assistance activity, that individual would enter the United States in a business capacity.
9. An individual being paid under a grant or contract competitively awarded by USAID to an implementer or university cannot be sponsored for USAID training or education or other activities under the sponsorship authority of USAID. An individual working under an award that was not competitively awarded, such as a sole-source award, may be classified as an exchange visitor depending on the purpose of the travel and contract mechanism used.

### *Conclusions*

1. Many U.S. universities carry a Department of State Exchange Visitor designation to issue J-1 visas. They have processes and infrastructure available on their campuses to administer these programs. Although universities would like to use these systems to administer USAID-funded exchange visitor programs, USAID designations to run

exchange visitor programs cannot be transferred to universities. Recommendations and next steps should therefore support aligning processes where possible to reduce redundancy and administrative burden. USAID and BIFAD have long recognized the well-established importance of developing human and institutional capacity in the successful implementation and resilience of USAID projects and the Feed the Future initiative. To develop human and institutional capacity and to ensure that USAID funded projects succeed, it is imperative that there be a free interchange of knowledge and experience across borders. The value of direct interaction of students, local actors, educators, and policy-makers from foreign countries with the educational and development organizations and systems in the United States cannot be understated.

2. Exposure of foreign students, educators, policy makers and change agents to U.S. economic and political norms, particularly through U.S. university programs, is critical. Through exposure to the inclusive and flexible systems and infrastructure, democratic processes, and robust economic systems extant in the United States, visitors see firsthand what they, their communities, and their countries can do to create successful, sustainable agricultural development and food security. This includes mentoring opportunities, as well as relationship and cohort building.
3. The exchange visitors (under USAID programs, past and present) are building and sustaining relationships and networks of support throughout the United States and the world's developing nations, finding mentors, and participating in cohort building. These activities are necessary to develop the local human and institutional capacity needed to create sustainable resilience.
4. Not only are USAID programs, such as the Feed the Future Innovation Labs, strengthening and enabling the growth of our domestic agricultural economy, they are providing the innovation needed to help developing countries reach the goal of food security.
5. Without the human and institutional capacity in the developing world to take these efforts forward, our ability to address the significant hunger and nutrition challenges of today, and the many challenges yet to come, will be limited to reactive intervention, and truly sustainable change and resilience will never be achieved.

*Recommendation:*

1. **USAID should make it a priority to streamline and simplify current USAID visa requirements, and in particular, participant training and exchange visitor definitions, policies and procedures, with the intention of removing burdensome restrictions and expanding opportunities for individuals seeking to be involved in U.S. university undergraduate, postgraduate and research programs.**